

BIRMINGHAM (May 30) – Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) and Congresswoman Terri Sewell (AL-7), in cooperation with Friends of Rickwood Field, today honored Reverend William Greason as part of the 2012 Rickwood Classic's tribute to "Wartime Baseball."

Reverend Greason is one of the Montford Point Marines who will be presented with a collective Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian honor, during a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol on June 27. As the first African-American Marines, the Montford Point Marines served their country with valor during World War II and subsequent assignments and played a historic role in integrating the U.S. military and society. Reverend Greason participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima and subsequently served during the Korean War. A Negro League baseball legend, Reverend Greason pitched at Rickwood Field as a Birmingham Black Baron and was one of the first African-Americans to play for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Congressman Bachus said, "There could be no more appropriate time and place to recognize Reverend Greason as one of the Montford Point Marines who will deservedly receive our highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal. In military service, on the baseball field, and in the church, Reverend Greason has been a source of inspiration for our community and our country."

Congresswoman Sewell said, "Reverend Greason is a role model in Birmingham as a veteran, baseball legend, and religious leader. The Congressional Gold Medal will help ensure that he and his fellow Montford Point Marines will be remembered alongside the Tuskegee Airmen and Buffalo Soldiers for their role in promoting equal rights and opportunities in our military and society."

During a recognition program held on the same field where he starred for the Black Barons, Reverend Greason was presented with a plaque from Congressman Bachus commemorating a tribute that he and Congresswoman Sewell entered permanently into the Congressional Record, a U.S. flag flown over the Capitol in his honor, and congratulatory letters on his military and community service and participation in the upcoming ceremony in Washington.

Retired Major Sergeant Willis Frazier of the Alabama Department of the American Legion, baseball historian W.B. "Bryan" Steverson, and Gerald Watkins of Friends of Rickwood Field offered remarks honoring Reverend Greason at the event.

BACKGROUND ON CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL

The Montford Point Marines will be collectively presented with a Congressional Gold Medal commemorating their service to America during a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol on June 27. As the first African-American Marines, the nearly 20,000 recruits trained at Camp Montford Point in North Carolina between 1942 and 1949 overcame discrimination and segregation to perform distinguished military service for the country during World War II and subsequent conflicts.

The requirements for the awarding of Congressional Gold Medals are set in statute by the rules of the Financial Services Committee, which Congressman Bachus chairs, and the House. The legislation was introduced by Rep. Corrine Brown of Florida and forwarded to the House floor with Chairman Bachus' support. It received unanimous approval in the House and Senate and was signed into law by President Obama on November 23, 2011.

Upon the signing of the legislation, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos, said of the Montford Point Marines, "Their story is one of triumph over adversity. Their legacy of courage and perseverance is an inspiration to all Marines."

During World War II, Reverend Greason participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima as a member of the 34th Marine Depot Company. His awards include a battle star, the Japan Occupation Medal and Presidential Unit Citation with one Bronze Star. He answered the call of duty a second time with service during the Korean War.